

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BONN 00786 01 OF 02 161649Z

46

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 SAJ-01 DRC-01 /116 W
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R 161641Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9756

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

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AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

AMCONSUL HAMBURG

AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 00786

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, GW

SUBJECT: FDP VIEWS ON SCHEEL SUCCESSION

1. FDP SENIOR BUNDESTAG WHIP WERNER MERTES TOLD EMBOFF JANUARY 11 THAT TALKS WITH THE SPD REGARDING THE MAKE-UP OF THE CABINET FOLLOWING SCHEEL'S ELECTION TO THE FEDERAL PRESIDENCY IN MAY HAVE BEEN POSTPONED FOR ABOUT A MONTH--I.E. UNTIL AFTER THE GOVERNMENT HAS SUBMITTED ITS LONG PROPOSED LEGISLATION ON CO-DETERMINATION IN INDUSTRY AND ON PROFIT-SHARING.

2. MERTES ALSO EXPRESSED THE CONVICTION THAT GENSCHER WILL BECOME SCHEEL'S SUCCESSOR IN ALL THREE ROLES--I.E.
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PAGE 02 BONN 00786 01 OF 02 161649Z

VICE CHANCELLOR, CHAIRMAN OF THE FDP, AND FOREIGN

MINISTER. ACCORDING TO MERTES, GENSCHER'S PRESENT PORTFOLIO, INTERIOR, MAY PROVE TO BE POLITICALLY MORE USEFUL IN THE FUTURE THAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS BUT POLITICAL FACE REQUIRES THAT THE FDP RETAIN SCHEEL'S CABINET POSITION. MAIHOFFER IS A POSSIBILITY AS GENSCHER'S SUCCESSOR AS MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR BUT THE VOICES AGAINST HIS ACCESSION TO THAT POSITION ARE NUMEROUS IN BOTH THE FDP AND THE SPD BECAUSE HE IS TOO MUCH THE PENSIVE INTELLECTUAL FOR A POSITION REQUIRING ADMINISTRATIVE FORCE AND DECISIVENESS.

3. WILLIWEUER OF NORTHRHINE-WESTPHALIA WOULD BE A FAR MORE LOGICAL CHOICE BUT HE HAS REPEATEDLY SAID THAT HE IS TIRED OF POLITICS, AND HIS HEALTH IS NOT GOOD. THE BEST SOLUTION, MERTES ADDED, WOULD BE MISCHNICK BUT THAT WOULD RAISE THE AWKWARD QUESTION OF WHO WOULD SUCCEED HIM AS FDP BUNDESTAG FLOOR LEADER. THERE IS NO OBVIOUS HEIR APPARENT AND THE MAN BEST QUALIFIED TO DO THAT JOB, LAMBSDORFF, IS NOT POPULAR WITH HIS PARTY'S LEFT WING. HOWEVER, AT THE MOMENT THIS LATTER POSSIBILITY HAS THE BEST CHANCE OF PREVAILING.

4. THERE IS SOME TALK ABOUT MORE COMPLEX MANEUVERING-- E.G. SHIFTHAHN TO INTERIOR AND GIVE MAIHOFFER JUSTICE-- BUT MOST OF THOSE SCHEMES CREATE MORE PROBLEMS THAN THEY SOLVE AND IN THE END SIMPLICITY WILL BE AN IMPORTANT FACTOR. MERTES THEN MADE THREE OBSERVATIONS: A) THE CDU/CSU WILL MOST PROBABLY NOT RUN A CANDIDATE AGAINST SCHEEL--IT WOULD BE OBVIOUSLY FUTILE AND THUS POLITICALLY USELESS, B)SCHEEL'S RECOVERY FROM HIS RECENT OPERATION IS SLOWER THAN ANTICIPATED BUT HIS CONDITION IS NOT SERIOUS, AND C) THE FDP-SPD NEGOTIATIONS OVER RE-BUILDING THE CABINET INCLUDE NO REFERENCE TO THE POST-1976 ERA.

5. MERTES ALSO SAID HE VIEWED GENSCHER'S RISE TO POWER

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PAGE 01 BONN 00786 02 OF 02 161648Z

46

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BONN 00786

TO BE ALL BUT IRRELEVANT TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A CDU/FPD COALITION IN 1976. HE SAID GENSCHER, BECAUSE HE IS KNOWN TO BE MORE CONSERVATIVE THAN SCHEEL AND THUS WILL BE UNDER CONSTANT SCRUTINY BY HIS MORE LIBERAL COLLEAGUES, WILL HAVE TO BE CAREFUL AS REGARDS CONTACTS WITH THE CDU. MERTES ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT THE REAL OBSTACLE TO SUCH A COALITION REMAINS WHAT IT HAS BEEN SINCE 1969, THE FACT THAT THE CDU/DSU IS BOTH LEADERLESS AND WITHOUT A COHERENT POLITICAL PROGRAM.

6. COMMENT. THE ABOVE IS CLEARLY AN EMPHATICALLY FDP VIEW OF THE SCHEEL SUCCESSION QUESTION. IT IS NOT GOING TO BE AS SIMPLE AS MERTES GIVES IT OUT TO BE. THERE ARE STRONG FEELINGS IN THE SPD THAT THE FDP IS TRYING TO
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PAGE 02 BONN 00786 02 OF 02 161648Z

PLAY A GAME IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF MINISTERIAL POSTS THAT EXCEEDS ITS REAL POLITICAL STRENGTH, AND THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO MAKE THIS POINT CLEAR. BRANDT IS FACED WITH THE PROBLEM OF KEEPING THE SPD'S COALITION PARTNER HAPPY, AND AT THE SAME TIME TAKING CARE OF OPINION WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY. IT IS A DELICATE BUSINESS. JUST HOW DELICATE IS SHOWN PERHAPS BEST OF ALL BY MERTES' STATEMENT THAT TALKS WITH THE SPD ON CABINET CHANGES HAVE BEEN POSTPONED FOR A MONTH. WHILE THE STATEMENT SHOULD PROBABLY NOT BE TAKEN AT FACE VALUE--TALKS IN SOME FORM WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CONTINUE--IT DOES SUGGEST

THAT THERE IS STILL SOME WAY TO GO BEFORE ALL THE
PIECES ARE FINALLY IN PLACE.
HILLENBRAND

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